

Guidance for K-12 Schools to Ensure the Jewish Experience is Included Across the Curriculum

The Center for Education Advocacy (CEA) at American Jewish Committee (AJC) shares a commitment to fostering educational environments that promote critical thinking and inclusivity. Our collaboration with schools ensures that these spaces remain welcoming to all identities, including Jewish students, faculty, and families, while firmly rejecting all forms of antisemitism.

Embarking on a curriculum audit is vital to ensuring the curriculum remains relevant and reflects best practices and students' evolving needs. By developing a culturally responsive curriculum, schools can better equip students to navigate and succeed in an ever-evolving world. While the process can be time-consuming, the outcome of a curriculum audit and revision is well worth the effort and energy devoted.

Below are questions for schools to consider as they embark on a curriculum audit regarding the place of Jews and Judaism in their scope and sequence. To help frame the process, we broadly outline some key themes, big ideas, and enduring understandings about the Jewish People.

We are here to help, so please do not hesitate to contact education@ajc.org for support.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN EMBARKING ON A CURRICULUM AUDIT

- Where and how does the curriculum reflect the diversity of Jewish identity and experiences over time and space?
- In what ways are the lived experiences and contributions of the Jewish people and individual Jews integrated into the curriculum across grade levels, courses, units, and lessons?
- Are Jewish individuals and their contributions represented in the curriculum in an authentic way that avoids tokenism?
- Does the school library have a collection of developmentally appropriate and relevant books about the Jewish experience that students and faculty can draw upon?
- Does the school provide access to teaching materials and/or workshops about how to teach about the Jewish experience (highlighting Jewish life, customs, traditions, migration, and resilience despite persecution) for different age students?
- Do curricula about different religious traditions and cultural groups include explorations of Judaism and the Jewish people? Are those explorations sensitive to the fact that Jews are not only a religious group, but also a culture/ethnicity/nation?
- Does the curriculum about the Holocaust follow best practices, as recommended by the [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#)?

FOR EXAMPLE: Jewish history and literature should be integrated meaningfully across subjects, not just in discussions of the Holocaust or turn of the twentieth century immigration to America. Instead of only a brief mention of Jewish immigrants at Ellis Island, educators can highlight Emma Lazarus (1849-1887), a Sephardic Jew (ancestors from Spain/Portugal) and a descendant of the [Recife 23](#), the first community of Jews to settle in what is now the United States. Lazarus' 1883 poem "The New Colossus," lines from which are enshrined on the base of the Statue of Liberty, helped shape American ideals about immigration. Embedding her family's history, her work and how it was influenced by her Jewish identity into lessons on history, literature, and civic identity ensures Jewish contributions are recognized as integral to broader narratives, not just as isolated references.

BIG IDEAS / ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT THE JEWISH PEOPLE

IDENTITY

- The Jewish people are a multinational, multi-ethnic people with shared ancestry, history, language, practices, sacred texts, and culture.
- Despite their dispersion, the Jewish people have maintained a connection to fellow Jews, and a shared culture and community across time and space.
- The story of the Jewish people is one of resilience, perseverance, and creativity, often in the face of overwhelming odds. Jewish history is often a unifying force for the Jewish community and helps inform Jewish identity.
- The foundational texts of Judaism (which is the religion of the Jewish people) are the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud, which each contain laws, ethics, and narratives central to Jewish faith, identity, and practice. Over the centuries, these sacred texts have expanded to include interpretations and practices that reflect diverse cultural, historical, and theological perspectives within the global Jewish community.

DIVERSITY

- Jewish identity is diverse. Jewish communities exist around the world, each influenced by local cultures, languages, and histories, and all connected to a notion of a united Jewish people.
- While Jews share many traditions and practices no matter where they live, distinct Jewish communities' cultures reflect the fusion of Jewish practice with local customs.

HISTORY

- The Jewish people have a historical connection to the Land of Israel going back over 3,000 years. Israel is referenced in a 13th c. BCE Egyptian text and archaeology shows that there was a vibrant Jewish society in the ancient Land of Israel by the 10th c. BCE.
- The Jewish people have a long history of persecution, migration and expulsion, contributing to the waning and disappearance of some Jewish communities, and the growth of other Jewish communities around the world.
- Antisemitism has existed for thousands of years, maintaining enduring stereotypes and tropes which morph and evolve to maintain relevance and power despite new circumstances. Antisemitism is cyclical; Jews may attain a certain status and level of comfort in a place only to lose it with startling speed, suddenly facing hatred, violence, exclusion, and even genocide.

ZIONISM & ISRAEL

- Zionism is the movement for Jewish self-determination in the Land of Israel, the ancestral homeland of the Jewish people.
- There are different interpretations and expressions of what Zionism looks like in practice.
- Zionism is a key component of the thriving, democratic, modern State of Israel.
- A significant majority of American Jews hold strong connections to Israel. Eight-in-ten U.S. Jews say caring about Israel is an essential or important part of what being Jewish means to them.¹

VALUES, PRACTICES, AND HOLIDAYS

- Jewish values and teachings are woven throughout Jewish sacred texts, liturgy, ritual, and everyday practice, reflecting a Jewish commitment to justice, communal responsibility, and the pursuit of ethical living.
- Awareness of various Jewish practices and holidays is an important way to ensure your school space is inclusive of Jewish students and faculty. See [AJC's guide to Jewish religion, culture, and holiday observances](#), which includes a 5-year calendar to help aid in planning and scheduling events (assemblies, conferences, exams, graduations, etc.) to minimize conflicts that involve the absence of Jewish students and personnel.

RECOMMENDED CURRICULAR PROVIDERS

- [Centropa](#): Central and Eastern European culture and life before World War II
- [ConnectED](#): Jewish history, Israel, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, civic engagement, social media literacy
- [Echoes and Reflections](#): Holocaust
- [Facing History and Ourselves](#): Civic education, dialogue across difference, antisemitism/Holocaust
- [Institute for Curriculum Services](#): Jews, Judaism, American Jewish history, antisemitism, and the Arab-Israeli conflict
- [JIMENA](#): Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa - Sephardi and Mizrahi Jewish history and culture
- [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#): Holocaust
- [Weitzman Museum of American Jewish History](#): American Jewish history

If you have questions, or would like to discuss these recommendations as they apply to your individual school space, please reach out to us: education@ajc.org.

1. Pew Research Center, "U.S. Jews' connections with and attitudes toward Israel" from [Jewish Americans in 2020](#), and American Jewish Committee, "AJC's Survey of American Jews" from [The State of Antisemitism in America 2024](#)